



Tom Rasmussen

It takes a village to end homelessness

If not for Seattle City Council member Tom Rasmussen's efforts, Chinatown/International District could very well be the home of the city's new hygiene center for the homeless. Thank goodness Rasmussen led the charge to search for alternatives and to listen to community members' concerns.

Rasmussen stepped forward late last year after Mayor Greg Nickels decided to invest \$3.2 million in a new comprehensive downtown homeless service center. Great idea, the councilman thought, but can it be done cheaper? Is it wise, he also wondered, to put it inside the forthcoming emergency-command center at Fourth and Yesler?

Not everyone was on board when Rasmussen offered to look for alternatives on his own, but the council gave him permission to do so. In the end, Chinatown/I.D. — and the city at large — are better off because of the extra work he did.

The Downtown Emergency Services Center, a nonprofit with a record of providing quality care to the homeless, will develop and operate the hygiene center, primarily for homeless men, at the Morrison Hotel at Third and Yesler. On Monday, eight of the nine council members hailed the Morrison plan as the best of all options.

It's not easy for a rookie council member to question a strong mayor. It takes guts. It's Rasmussen's reputation on the line, after all. We applaud him for having the courage to ask questions and presenting other options to the council.

But this issue should not be whittled down to a Rasmussen-versus-Nickels fight. It never degenerated into that. This was a group effort, through and through.

If it weren't for Nickels finding \$3.2 million for the service center in the first place, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. Kudos to the mayor for putting the spotlight on homelessness, an issue that city officials and government agencies have been talking and talking — and talking — about solving for years now. Finally, Nickels decided to do something. He recognized that it was time to stop talking and begin implementing a plan.

Chinatown/International District activists also played a big role. They balked at the idea of a hygiene center in their neighborhood, and Rasmussen listened. Rasmussen, to his credit, made it a point to pay attention to multiple points of view before coming to a final decision.

It's been a long time coming, but Seattle is now on a path towards ending homelessness. Not only will the Morrison Hotel provide a place for the homeless to shower and do their laundry, but it will also offer counseling and employment assistance. It will play an active role in ending the cycle of homelessness. This comprehensive service center is the first of its kind for the city.

Don't forget that it took the efforts of a lot of people to reach this momentous point in Seattle's history.



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